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Evangelisation and Culture – A Necessary Interplay for the Church and Catechesis Today

Dr. Antony Christy Lourdunathan, SDB

Abstract

The article deals with an oft-studied theme of the relationship between evangelisation and culture, the novelties being: new evangelisation as the background, the recently published *Directory for Catechesis* and a deliberate point of view from Culture, instead of the conventional dimension of evangelisation. After presenting a brief socio-psychological, anthropological and post-modern perspective of Culture, the author traces the importance of an encounter between faith and culture, which serves as the key to understanding the evangelisation-culture interplay. Underlining the role of Catechesis within this interplay, the article seeks to present a few crucial elements of complexity within the present cultural change, that a process of evangelisation has to reckon with in the current cultural milieu and indicates the types of encounter that are necessary between evangelisation and culture today: hermeneutic, symbiotic, programmatic and prophetic.

Key Terms

Catechesis; Cultural Changes; Culture; Faith; New Evangelisation; Process of Evangelisation

The Church exists to evangelise,¹ affirmed *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and “whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world,”² outlining the framework for what is termed *New Evangelisation*, although it believes that every form of authentic evangelisation is always ‘new’. Tracing the history of the concept of ‘New Evangelisation’, can point to the journey the Church today has made which could be consolidated under the title, ‘from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to *Evangelii Gaudium*’, actually a journey of over five decades stretching from the Second Vatican Council to till date. Apart from the commonality that these two Apostolic Exhortations, separated by a span of 38 years, were preceded by a synod – the former by the Third Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in 1974 (Evangelisation in the Modern World) and the latter by the Thirteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops held in 2012 (The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith) – they can be seen as two major milestones of a pilgrim community of Faith, in the continual discovery of its self-identity in the world where it is called to live. Sharing his view after the Synod on New Evangelisation (2012), Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl had said, “we are in a new moment in the life of the Church and are moving in the right direction,”³ subscribing to the popular opinion that this historical epoch of the Church could easily be identified as the *Age of New Evangelisation*.

1. New Evangelisation

‘New Evangelisation’ has a specific meaning and historical significance to the Church today. The movement initiated by the Vatican Council II and the Pontiff of the Council, Paul VI, came to be ratified in the words of Blessed Pope John Paul II at a discourse to the XIX Assembly of CELAM, at Port au Prince on 9 March 1983: the Church as a community of faith and called to bear witness to the good news, has to urgently renew its commitment in the world, “a commitment, not of re-evangelization, but rather of a

new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression.”⁴ It was John Paul II himself, who had initiated this orientation in 1979, during one of his visits to Poland, stating that the Church finds itself in ‘new times’ and amidst ‘new conditions of life’ and it has initiated a ‘new evangelisation’ which has to be treated almost as ‘second proclamation’ though the message is always one and the same. He himself had identified the sectors in which New Evangelisation has to work, namely culture, society, economics, civic life and religion.⁵

Issuing his message for the World Mission Day in October 2011, Pope Benedict XVI reinforced the orientation given by his predecessor, that the Church has the urgent duty to proclaim the Gospel in ‘new situations’ that ‘require new evangelisation’. This ‘new situation’ that he referred to, according to his own view, is a situation of de-Christianisation of the countries evangelised centuries back. Noticing today a progressive distancing from the Christian faith, Pope Benedict in the apostolic letter dated October 12, 2010, established the special Vatican Agency for promotion of New Evangelisation – a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation.⁶ Calling for a whole new primary proclamation, Benedict XVI identified,

a variety of factors in the weakening of religious faith: advances in science and technology, the widening of individual freedom and lifestyle choices, profound economic changes, the mixing of cultures and ethnic groups brought about by migration, and the growing interdependence among peoples. Such changes have brought about benefits for many people, but they have often been accompanied by “a troubling loss of the sense of the sacred.” Undoubtedly, a “new evangelization” is urgently needed.⁷

It was in this context that the necessity of a Synod of Bishops (2012) on this all-important theme was foreseen. Kroeger had drawn a list of ten traits of New Evangelisation, emerging from the pre-Synodal discussion: Centrality of Christ, Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Freedom, a Multi-faceted Process, Social

Teachings of the Church, Evangelisation of Cultures, Social Communications, Responsibilities of every Christian and the Role of the Holy Spirit.⁸ And reflecting after the Synod, Cardinal Wuerl explained, “New Evangelisation is not one specific action or activity of the Church, but rather a way of seeing a whole range of activities carried on by the Church to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.”⁹ He highlighted three areas that Benedict XVI underlined as the defining dimensions of New Evangelisation at the concluding Eucharist of the Synod: (1) the ordinary pastoral ministry that has to be carried out with more fire of the Spirit; (2) the first proclamation, that is the announcement of the message of salvation to those who do not know Jesus Christ; and (3) the re-proposing of the Good News to those who have lost the fervour of their initial faith.

However, there was an Asian critique offered to the conceptualisation at the synod and around it – that it was coloured predominantly by a ‘western’ perspective. It seemed that even in the most prepared circles, the changing global context was not considered in its entirety or with its finer points. Although the reflections were drawn from the sharing of the Synod fathers from all parts of the world, they managed to extend their reach barely up to globalization – they fell quite short of naming anything close to ‘Pluralism,’ which would have come closer to making the Church more conscious of one of the latest signs of the times – the need for New Evangelisation. The condition of Pluralism, by now, is no more typically Oriental or Asian. Taking this condition into serious consideration requires that the Church today begins to accept it and learns to meaningfully respond to it.

Another pertinent observation could be made regarding the erstwhile ideation of the evangelisation-culture interplay – that it has been prominently undertaken from the vantage point of evangelisation, understandably an inside affair of the Church and hardly from the cultural point of view. The conspicuous question has mostly been, ‘how do we evangelise the changing culture?’ Despite being an oft-analysed theme, taking advantage of the increased thrust on New Evangelisation and the publication of the new *Directory for Catechesis*, this article shall attempt a shift of focus, rephrasing

the question as, ‘what does the changing culture bring, as specific demands, to the process of evangelisation and catechesis today?’

General Directory for Catechesis, 1997 which had served the Catechetical ministry for the past two decades, inspired by the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, was founded on the *General Catechetical Directory*, 1971 – a fruit of the Ecumenical Council of the twentieth century and of the rising demand for directives to govern the field of education to faith. The 1997 revision was necessitated by the Synod on Evangelisation (1974), its outcomes (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975), the vision of *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) and the eventual Universal Catechism.¹⁰ The synod and the *directory*, in all these decades, have contributed extensively towards establishing the integral relationship between evangelisation and catechesis, clearing the ambiguity of treating them merely as two mutually exclusive and chronologically distinctive phases within the process of communication of faith. They have served to make sense of the process of catechesis, as an integral part of the holistic vision of evangelisation, and the same legacy has been carried over by the new *directory*.

Directory for Catechesis, 2020, as its pages of presentation cite, in addition to the Conciliar teaching, the post-Conciliar reflections of the 70s, and the General Directory of 1997, finds its inspiration in the Synod of 2012 and the consequent exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* – all of them in perfect continuity with each other.¹¹ Capitalising on the five decades of theologising on New Evangelisation, the *directory* highlights the “inseparable connection between evangelisation and catechesis in the light of the culture of encounter.”¹² The *directory* elucidates vibrantly the fundamental role that culture has within the process of evangelisation and catechesis. Before getting into a thematic analysis of this elucidation, a simple textual analysis can already point to this fact: the term ‘culture’ in its noun form can be spotted 126 times in the text (excluding footnotes and bibliographical notes) and in its adjectival form (cultural) can be seen 93 times. Though these numbers, in themselves, may mean nothing much, they are indeed indicative of the space offered for the concept and the phenomenon of ‘culture’ by the *Directory*, in view of making

the process of evangelisation and catechesis relevant and proper to the times. The rest of this work shall intend to present a current understanding of ‘culture’ and identify the challenges posed by this understanding to the process of evangelisation and catechesis, throwing light on those specific directives from the new *directory* that point to ways of responding to these newer demands.

2. Understanding the Reality of Culture

The concept of culture is essentially semiotic, explains Clifford Geertz, one of the most referred-to thinkers on the significance of culture and its processes. He says that the analysis of culture therefore would be, “not an experimental science of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”¹³ In his work, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, he lists the varied definitions that are possible, citing them from, Clyde Kluckhohn¹⁴ an author from the seventies – a period when the term ‘culture’ was being critically studied and analysed. Culture can be defined as,

- (1) “the total way of life of a people”; (2) “the social legacy the individual acquires from his group”; (3) “a way of thinking, feeling, and believing”; (4) “an abstraction from behaviour”¹⁵; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a “storehouse of pooled learning”; (7) “a set of standardized orientation to recurrent problems”; (8) “learned behavior”; (10) “a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to the other men”; (11) “a precipitate of history”....¹⁶

To imagine culture as a self-contained super organic reality with forces and purposes of its own would be a reification of it, while on the other hand considering it merely as some behavioural patterns that are identifiable in society would be a serious reduction.¹⁷ “Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described.”¹⁸ It would denote “an historically transmitted pattern of

meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”¹⁹ Geertz offers an intriguing insight when he says, “cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right.”²⁰ These insights highlight the care to be taken to avoid being presumptuous, with conclusive claims when it comes to culture, cultures or anything to do within the process where two or more cultures meet or coexist.

From a socio-psychological perspective, culture has to be necessarily understood as a multidimensional rather than a unitary construct. It has to be seen that “societies socialize for and individuals have access to a diverse set of overlapping and contradictory processes and procedures for making sense of the world and that the processes and procedures that are cued in the moment influence the values, relationality, self-concept, well-being, and cognition that are salient in the moment.”²¹ Culture is neither an entity nor is it stable. Any given society socialises its members for multiple, and many a times, potentially contradictory cultural component sets that are given rise to by varied situations. Hence endorsing the view that ‘one society pertains to one culture’ would prevent us from taking note of the parallels between such component sets within a society or in a set of societies or between seemingly different societies.²²

Anthropologists admit that a definition from the Victorian era, like that of Edward B. Tylor in 1871, which considers culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man²³ as a member of society,”²⁴ is prone to distinguishing between people or nations possessing ‘culture’ to a greater or lesser degree. Anthropologists in the thirties reflected on “*Kulturbrille*, a set of ‘cultural glasses’ that each of us wears, lenses that provide us with a means for perceiving the world around us, for interpreting the

meaning of our social lives, and framing action in them.”²⁵ In the forties, another dimension was added, which presented culture as an,

integral whole consisting of implements and consumers' goods, of constitutional charters for the various social groupings, of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs. Whether we consider a very simple or primitive culture or an extremely complex and developed one, we are confronted by a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human, and partly spiritual, by which man is able to cope with the concrete, specific problems that face him.²⁶

In the eighties, taking the cue from Emile Durkheim from half a century earlier, Claude Levi-Strauss explained that there is a ‘need for order’ in the human mind and that human reasoning is founded on the mind’s binary nature, the very nature which is a replica of the universe itself which possesses an order within it and is definitely not chaos. The ‘reason’ that the human mind works on, is the cause of a cultural evolution.²⁷ A study, a decade later, opines that culture “refers broadly to the forms throughout which people make sense of their lives... It does not inhabit a set-aside domain, as does... politics or economics. [...] Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Neither high nor low, culture is all-pervasive.”²⁸ Human cultures, therefore, the anthropologists conclude, are varied in an infinite sense but all within the framework of what human persons and communities can produce, understand and manage. Through the last century, we have had schools of anthropology that proposed varied determining realities to understand and frame a culture – Karl Marx’s proposal of the modes of production, Emile Durkheim’s notion of the sociological dynamics of power and functional relations, Sigmund Freud’s perspective of the unconscious, Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict speaking of the patterns of culture²⁹ – each and all of those, reinforcing the fact that culture and cultures are human-made and they in turn determine what humans need to be.

Tracing a post-modern turn of understanding culture, Zygmunt Bauman declares this is an era of human-made foundations of

existence, with which he believes that no longer does culture “have to mask its own human fragility and apologize for the contingency of its choices. Naturalization of culture [...] is] part and parcel of the modern disenchantment of the world. Its deconstruction, which followed the culturalization of nature was made possible – perhaps inevitable – by the world’s postmodern re-enchantment.”³⁰ As he says, the idea of culture as a ‘system’ is a thing of the past and a system resents any grey area or no-man’s land, guarding its borders sanctimoniously because uncontrolled breaches of those borders would spell its collapse. An outside element may be allowed to pass the border, only in as much as it is ready to undergo the process of *adaptation* or *accommodation*, which would be mostly what it takes to fit the newcomer into the system and enable the system to *assimilate* it. Assimilation here is however a one-way process – for the newcomer it would be a transformation, while for the system, a reassertion of its self-identity.³¹ When it comes to culture, its borders, and the interactions, the thinkers of the post-modern times, speak of the border-crossings as essential phenomena to be taken into consideration today. “The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress.”³² There is a dominating sense of ‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ that is felt and expressed by those who are, rightly, convinced that ‘culture’ is as much about inventing, as it is about preserving. There is a need to discontinue, break away, think new, break patterns, transcend fixed boundaries, change and be unpredictable and not merely preserve, repeat, reproduce and maintain the status quo.³³ Bauman refers to the present times as ‘the end of geography’, observes that the modes of high paced travel and the availability of cheap communication have relativized spatiality to a great extent resulting in making this notion of ‘systemness’ almost senseless.³⁴

It can be said that in liquid modern times, culture [...] is fashioned to fit individual freedom of choice and individual responsibility for that choice; and that its

function is to ensure that the choice should be and will always remain a necessity and unavoidable duty of life, while the responsibility for the choice and its consequences remains where it has been placed by the liquid modern human condition – on the shoulders of the individual, now appointed to the position of chief manager of ‘life politics’ and its sole executive.³⁵

Times are such that thinkers have begun to speak more of cultures, than culture, more about cultural interstices that cultural ‘fixeds’, more about spaces *in between* than about territories marked out. These are indicative of the grandiose transitions that have taken place in the society today, from the so-called pre-modern age, through the enlightenment and the colonial age, across the post-colonial age to the present age of liquidity or fluidity.³⁶

To arrive at a working definition, from the entire analysis undertaken thus far, culture could be understood as the totality of preconceptions, concepts, modes of disposition and behaviour and determining values, that together govern the thought and actions of individuals and communities in a particular shared context. It is a comprehensive term that refers to every aspect of the concrete life of persons, as persons and as members of a human community with a shared identity. When this concept of culture, rather cultures, is reflected upon from a specific perspective of faith, be it personal or communitarian, it can open up horizons of vivid discussion that can both strengthen structures or deconstruct systems within the framework of faith and religion. Hence it is essential to explore the meeting point of faith and culture or cultures, that point where evangelisation and culture encounter.

3. Faith – Culture(s) Encounter

The task undertaken here is not primarily a psycho-philosophico-anthropological exploration of culture, but an observation of that space where faith, culture, and cultures meet and a study of the efficacious means, modes and methods of faith sharing within that crucial space. Hence in this context, culture shall be referred to, as

indicated already, as a way of life, a composite and shared social reality, which allows the beliefs, values, attitudes, practices to be understood with the help of languages and ways of reasoning that is peculiar to various paradigms of thinking that people adopt in a particular society. These paradigms would be seen manifested in the types of governments, the policies of education, the economic structures, health care managements, transport systems and numerous other signs and symbols that are associated with food, clothing, architecture, art forms, cults and so on. These become a sort of glue that binds people together, creating among them a sense of identity and community. Obviously, the study does not give into the polemics that involve conceptions like ‘cultured persons’ or ‘cultured society’, where culture is meant to refer to high standards of knowledge of literature and arts.³⁷ Steering clear of these possible misconceptions, anyone giving a serious thought to faith and its expressions, would in no time be faced with the reality of culture, which has so much intertwined with faith and religion. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* states it with clarity:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelisation, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelisation are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelisation of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.³⁸

The legacy of Pope Paul VI was carried forward by Pope John Paul II when he created the Pontifical Council for Culture. Their conviction has governed the theology of the Catholic Church ever since, namely, “the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of the culture, but also of faith... A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not faithfully lived out.”³⁹ One of the tasks that the Church has always considered seriously is the “demand of evangelisation of cultures and the inculcation of the message of faith,”⁴⁰ affirms the Council for Culture. The affirmation of the Council accentuates the essential interdependence of culture and faith. In fact, the Council in the same document asserts that “the evangelisation of cultures and the inculcation of the Gospel go hand in hand, in a reciprocal relationship which presupposes constant discernment in the light of the Gospel, to facilitate the identification of values and counter-values in a given culture, so as to build on the former and vigorously combat the latter.”⁴¹ Here is seen emerging another key concept to be understood, that of *inculturation*.

Inculcation can be understood as “a *dynamic interaction between ecclesial faith and societal culture*: between living faith of an ecclesial community and living culture of a concrete society.”⁴² Cultural anthropological terms such as *acculturation* and *enculturation*,⁴³ could throw light on a clearer understanding of inculcation. Acculturation, a term that refers to the contact between two or more cultures and the resultant cultural changes, was initially used in the ecclesial circles to describe the encounter between the evangelising Church and the local cultures. Owing to the specific connotations of the term in the anthropological framework,⁴⁴ it was later replaced by the term inculcation.⁴⁵

Inculcation is said to derive its sense from the process that anthropologists define as enculturation, referring to the process by which a person is initiated into his or her culture. Specific to the pastoral-theological field, it refers to the “dynamic insertion of ecclesial faith in a particular societal culture.”⁴⁶ This faith-culture encounter, a bipolar interaction or correlation is dialogic, diacritical and dialectic: dialogic because there is a mutual communication with

respect and equality between faith and culture, diacritical as they mutually purify and enrich as the believing community and the cultural society, and dialectic because there is a consistent and dynamic movement towards an enlightened synthesis. In and through this process of mutual interaction the mystery of Christ revealed and received, is interpreted and understood ever more fully in the concrete life situation of persons and communities, and on the other hand, the mystery revealed enriches and purifies the new cultures that get to encounter it. Faith purifies cultures and the new cultures encountering faith enable the ecclesial understanding of the mystery of Christ to grow a step further towards its fullness.⁴⁷ Inculturation has to be essentially thought of as a typical Christian attitude and an essential Christian praxis,⁴⁸ that is, a matter of daily Christian living. Evangelisation, understood as a faith-sharing of a community of faith, within the community and as a community with the world, is best done in an ambience of inculturated living of Christian faith.

Although from 1979 when Pope John Paul II officially used the term ‘inculturation’ in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*,⁴⁹ right until lately as Pope Francis directs in his Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, “it is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel,”⁵⁰ the term ‘inculturation’ has been in the official teaching of the Church, theologians widely take an exception to a total compliance to that term, inculturation. They find in it a substantial danger of domestication of faith on the part of a single culture, even with all its infirmities.⁵¹ They prefer a switch to the term *Interculturation*, the 1980 coinage of which has been credited to Bishop Joseph Blomjous.⁵² However, it would be too simplistic an understanding to say that the concept of inculturation gradually grew into that of interculturation or that the latter is an improvement on the former. They, as terminologies in the ecclesial circles, were almost born contemporarily as noted above and were two highly related perspectives of the mission of the Church. The latter came to be preferred by thinkers in those contexts that were sensitive to the emerging Third World post-colonial identities. This can be noted in the fact that Pedro Arrupe, the then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, in the letter in which he laid down a classical definition of inculturation also noted, that

the Christian experience in a given culture has an influence that transforms and renews and, perhaps after a crisis of confrontation, leads to a fresh wholeness in that culture. Further Christian experience helps a culture to assimilate universal values which no one culture can exhaustively realize [...] the problem lies in a wise channeling of this intercultural influence. Christianity [...] must ease tensions and conflicts, and create genuine communion.⁵³

We see here a special attention given to an important and historical movement in the socio-cultural anthropological arena, a movement from a mere acknowledgement of multiculturality to a conscious choice of interculturality. The process of evangelisation or new evangelisation has to be marked by this attention by all means.

4. Evangelisation, Culture(s) and Catechesis

Catechesis is the ministry of the Word, aimed at the total conversion of a person towards Christ, within a community of faithful, providing an essential foundation for this conversion in and through an ongoing education in faith.⁵⁴ The *GDC* had explicitly stated that Catechetics as the science of this ministry of the Word, needs to consolidate the “conception of catechesis as a school of faith, an initiation and apprenticeship in the entire Christian life,”⁵⁵ evict the needless and artificial ‘content-method’ dualism and find the right balance between the pedagogical and theological dimensions that are proper to faith, says the Catechetical Directory.⁵⁶ It explained too that the Catechetical methodology which aims at ‘education in faith’ as its overall objective, avails of the pedagogical sciences and of communication, in accomplishing its task.⁵⁷ An insistence on the part of the *Directory for Catechesis* towards a holistic and interrelated approach with regard to the content, the method and the techniques within the process of catechesis, is an indication towards the holistic process of evangelisation, as communication of faith.

Culture, cultures and pluriculturality are taken seriously by a holistic catechetical process, and this is evidenced by the importance that the catechetical directories attach to themes within this domain.

Highlighting the distinctive understanding of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘cultures’ and warning against any kind of monopolisation in the process, the GCD had accentuated the essential task of inculturation in two chapters, however with a gentle reminder that “it needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced” and that it “should be an expression of the community’s life.”⁵⁸ The *DC* gets more specific as it declares that “catechesis is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures” and explains that “the specific contribution of catechesis to evangelisation is the attempt to enter into relationship with the experience of persons, with their ways of living and the processes of personal and community growth [... and that] Inculturation, is at its heart, aimed at the process of internalisation of the experience of faith.”⁵⁹

Pluriculturality or multiculturality, as another complex element in relation to the phenomenon of culture, is not any more an attribute proper to certain parts of the world but has by far become an experience that is felt and that affects the entire globe, perhaps with a peculiarity that is proper to each of the regions. The Church both at the universal and the local level is open to and highly positive about an intercultural approach that it seeks to have in every aspect of its life and ministry. The Evangelising mission of the Church, that is the vocation of the Church as a whole, the local faith communities and every faithful, to share the Gospel of the Reign of God, requires that every person in the society and every society, be respected, loved, accepted and related to with dignity. Catechesis is a process in which a Christian and the Christian community become truly aware of this call, receive it wholeheartedly and learn to live it concretely.

As the *General Directory for Catechesis* states, “Catechesis, while avoiding all manipulation of culture, is not limited to a mere juxtaposition of the Gospel with culture in some ‘decorative manner’. Rather it proposes the Gospel ‘in a vital way, profoundly, by going to the very roots of culture and the cultures of mankind’.”⁶⁰ The new *Directory for Catechesis*, in fact, cites the same article from *GDC*⁶¹ and further reiterates elsewhere, “the evangelisation of culture requires getting to the heart of culture itself, where new themes and paradigms are generated, reaching the deepest core of

individuals and of societies in order to illuminate them from within with the light of the Gospel.”⁶² Secondly, only a catechesis that is committed to the needy in the society will be effective these days, especially when poverty, misery, injustice and a highly imbalanced development process are seen as ‘normal’ consequences of progress. Catechesis cannot remain silent in this scenario. After the model of Christ and the disciples, the catechised Christian community has to enter into dialogue, a dialogue that inspires transformation. The process of Catechesis has to grow more and more conscious of the culture that surrounds it and the import it has on the Christian faith.

This defines a dynamic process consisting of various interactive elements: a listening in the culture of the people, to discern an echo (omen, invocation, sign) of the word of God; a discernment of what has an authentic Gospel value or is at least open to the Gospel; a purification of what bears the mark of sin (passions, structures of evil) or of human frailty; an impact on people through stimulating an attitude of radical conversion to God, of dialogue, and of patient interior maturation.⁶³

A renewed process of Catechesis today, needs to engage in a dialogue with the culture and the cultures in which it takes place, it has to enable a positive and proactive interaction between faith and culture, between cultures and between diverse elements within a culture in the light of faith and God’s Word. There are certain elements of complexity in the phenomenon of culture as such, that place an extra demand on the process of evangelisation and catechesis. The following section shall highlight just a few of them.

5. Elements of Complexity in the Changing Times

Though it is a repetition, it has to be emphasised that culture cannot be reduced to a singular concept that can be clarified and addressed without taking into account the varied complexities it embodies. To begin with, by culture one can refer to a subjective, an intersubjective, a collective or an objective phenomenon. It is a subjective culture when what is referred to is the lifestyle, customs

and value system in which an individual has been nurtured, owing to his or her natural background and context. An intersubjective culture could be the outlook, priorities and value systems that are created when one or more individuals from varied backgrounds live together, as in a hostel or an apartment of the present-day cities. A collective culture could refer to a carefully and consciously promoted commonality, shared value system and priorities with the intent of creating an identity, as in a language or an ethnic group. An objective culture is a construct that could be proposed from an external agent, to be adhered to for the sake of living and participating in a common identity that is aspired to be evolved, as in a campus culture or a religious sect. A faith-culture encounter such as the process of evangelisation and catechesis has to take into consideration all these modes of culture, and not content itself with ideal conceptualisations and simplistic definitions.

The concern for the ‘contemporary culture’ is insistently expressed in the *DC*,⁶⁴ with the indication that the ongoing changes and developments cannot be neglected, if the fundamental desire is to respond adequately to the signs of the times. Of the very many changing elements of the contemporary culture, from the foregone reflections in this article, the following could be observed as crucial and among the most exigent developments: the liquidity of the contemporary culture, the globalising processes, the secularisation of faith and the emerging virtue of ecclesiocentrifugality and Reign-thinking.

Liquid Culture: Speaking of the concept of ‘liquid culture’ as referential to the present times, Bauman underlines the proliferation of uncertainties that the contemporary culture holds out to humanity. “Uncertainty means fear. No wonder we dream, time and again, of a world with no accidents. A regular world. A predictable world [...] a reliable world, one we can trust. A secure world.”⁶⁵ Is this not a familiar sentiment, that which we call sometimes hope?

Globalising Processes: Many a social problem today in the society appears to have no concrete solution, at least no solutions that would last long! Every individual feels, and worse still, has no

problem accepting, that he or she cannot do little about making a considerable difference at a large scale. And a vast majority end up doing something at the local level to make a difference and remain content with it. Social thinkers explain this as, “the paradox of an increasingly local politics in a world increasingly shaped and reshaped by global processes.” At times we are at the service of globalising processes, and fail to reap the right fruits from them.

Secularisation of Faith: We are getting past the times when faith and secularisation are poised one against the other. It is not either faith or secularisation anymore, as there is a more challenging phenomenon on the rise – the secularisation of faith. Kenneth Stokes explains:

“Religious” is seen by many people to refer to the rituals and dogmas, structures and programs of the institutional church. [...] Being “religious” does not *necessarily* need to indicate that one has a deep faith or an active prayer life. [...] “Spiritual” is used as the metaphor for the personalization of religion. “Spiritual” persons may or may not be active in any faith community, but are those for whom faith is continually nurtured through prayer, meditation, challenging books, honest talks with friends, simple beauties of nature, art and music and the like.⁶⁶

This explanation from three decades ago holds good even, or much more, today. As there are more and more yearning for that encounter with the Divine, but are more inclined to find a way of their own to arrive at it.

Ecclesiocentrifugality and the Reign-Thinking: The Church-centred approach to evangelisation and faith sharing is increasingly placed under scrutiny, from within and from elsewhere, as decades pass by. The ideal of ‘the Church that goes forth’⁶⁷ proposed by Pope Francis is a call towards an ecclesiocentrifugality, that is a sense of moving out, a ‘missionary option’ which the Pontiff explains in the words of one of his predecessors, John Paul II: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion.”⁶⁸ This is not merely a dislocation or

a dismantling of a centre, but a reorientation towards the Reign of God, promoting the capacity of every believer or every missionary disciple, towards a Reign-centred approach, towards Reign-thinking. This development could be highly perplexing to some within the Church, who might still have to reconcile themselves to the current developments.

These changing scenarios demand a response adequate and profound, flexible and far-reaching, not remaining merely crisis management but leading to a newer vision and broader outlook, making the Church a true protagonist of Divine-human encounter and a sacrament of salvation to the humankind. The response can be envisaged in terms of responsible, respectful and relevant encounters between the process and mission of evangelisation and the reality of the concrete and exigent culture or cultures. The *Directory for Catechesis* points to this encounter as possible and as the ideal towards which the process of evangelisation and catechesis needs to endeavour. Thus proposed encounter can have certain qualities that make it relevant and vibrant.

6. Evangelisation as Gospel-Culture(s) Encounter:

One of the declarations from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that has turned epochal is, the “split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time.”⁶⁹ Evangelisation, therefore, has to be concerned above all in addressing this split. That can be done, only if the process of evangelisation is understood as an encounter between the Message of salvation brought to humankind and the actual and concrete life and experience of the same humanity. Such an encounter needs to be hermeneutic, symbiotic, programmatic and prophetic in nature, in order that the process of evangelisation and the phenomenon of culture enter into a meaningful exchange.

A Hermeneutic Encounter: Evangelisation is a hermeneutic encounter between the Gospel and the culture. “Thanks to this encounter [...] with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. [...] For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our

lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?”⁷⁰ The *directory* acknowledges this call, as it admits that “understanding culture as a hermeneutic setting for the faith offers catechesis greater possibilities for significantly reaching its goals of being education *for* the faith and *in* the faith.”⁷¹ Although the mission of evangelisation is entrusted to the Church, the community of faith, the Church does not claim that it is the sole interpreter or generator of meaning. The emerging new cultures, new languages, symbols, messages and paradigms can offer the community of faith newer approaches to life and faith sharing.⁷² However, there is always a need for mutual critical knowledge and appraisal, with openness and a genuine search for meaning. A holistic process of evangelisation offers the possibility of this hermeneutic encounter.

A Symbiotic Encounter: Faith and culture cannot be far apart from each other, because they are symbiotic by nature. One enriches the other and enables maturity and fruitfulness. The culture is the very forum where faith is received, lived and shared. It is faith that gives rise to a culture that is worthy of a human person who has been created in the image and likeness of the Creator. This mutuality can never be lost. Faith and culture cannot be referred to or spoken of, as if one is opposed to the other or as though they have to be brought together with much effort. Hence the Gospel-culture encounter needs to happen in the most natural manner possible, inspired by the mystery of incarnation, where the Word became flesh in the most natural and unassuming way, taking the human existence as his own and inserting himself into a particular time and culture.⁷³ Evangelisation as a process makes this symbiotic encounter possible, identifying the seeds of the Goodnews in the culture and tracing the fulfilment of the culture in the Gospel.

A Programmatic Encounter: That the process of evangelisation and the reality of culture, have their specific purpose and finality, can never be denied. The process of evangelisation intends to plant the seeds of the Gospel in the culture that it encounters, while a culture seeks to refine itself, sustain itself and celebrate its identity. There is an element of self-promotion that forms part of these two which encounter each other and hence the encounter itself should enhance

that promotion – the Gospel enriches the culture with elements for its self-promotion and the culture offers the seedbed for the Gospel to take roots and grow into the Reign, which is the fullness of all that exists. Evangelisation cannot be seen as implantation of a culture called Christian culture in the place of what has been there originally; this would be a colonising attitude that has been historically superseded. Instead, what happens is a mutual appreciation of the Gospel and the culture in contact, out of which is born a new culture, an enriched and Christ-filled form of what was already there,⁷⁴ with the original elements of goodness, truth and beauty intact.

A Prophetic Encounter: The process of evangelisation would have failed if it does not manage to challenge, purify and refine the culture it encounters. It would be considered a failure equally, if at the end of the process the faith experience that was shared has not enriched itself with newer perspectives and deeper insights. “An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it,” reflects Pope Francis.⁷⁵ This is probably the God-given human yearning, deep-seated in every child of God, that occasions the experience of faith sharing and the process of evangelisation. If evangelisation is taking God’s Word, the Message of salvation, the person of Christ to persons, it cannot but stand for the values of Christ, the values of the Reign that Christ inaugurated in his person and in his life and death. Every person, event or process that stands for the Reign of God, is prophetic, because, “our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.”⁷⁶ The *directory* states with emphasis that the message of Christ has an unambiguous social content which calls the process of catechesis, within evangelisation, to present to everyone “a new vision of life, of humanity, of justice, of social existence, of the whole cosmos which emerges from the faith.”⁷⁷ The integrity and dignity of the human person as a whole, the inviolability of life, the value of freedom, the importance of solidarity and compassion, the commitment towards ecology – all these and more, need to be held high in every cultural

context⁷⁸ and this is a prophetic task that is entrusted to the process of evangelisation.

Conclusion

Secularisation and De-Christianisation challenge the western globe, while Religious fundamentalism and Social inhumanities threaten the east; globalisation of inequalities, mismanagement of migration and depletion of the cosmic resources affect the entire humanity. What would evangelisation mean for us today, against the background of this widespread culture of death? The salvific message of Christ, who deigned to save us through his absolute self-giving, has to reach every nook and corner of the universe, not for our hidden agenda and proof of honour, but for the fullness of life for all. The crucial and necessary interplay between evangelisation and culture, when respected and promoted, will ensure that the Church realises its role as the sacrament of salvation to the world, and that humanity finds its way towards true meaning and fulfilment.

Endnotes

¹ Paul VI, *Adhortatio Apostolica Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in *AAS* 68 (1976)1, n.14; English version: *Evangelisation in the Modern World: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in Flannery Austin (ed.), *Vatican Council II – Vol.II.: More Post-Conciliar Documents* (Mumbai, St. Paul Publication, 2010), n. 14. (EN)

² Francis, *Adhortatio Apostolica Evangelii Gaudium*, in *AAS* 105 (2013)12, n. 69; in English, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), n. 11. (EG)

³ Donald W. Wuerl, *New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Inc., 2013), 11.

⁴ As cited in General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly of Synod of Bishops: *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith: Instrumentum Laboris 2012*, n. 45, cited from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20120619_instrumentum-xiii_en.html#_ftnref34, n. 45 (21.11.2013).

⁵ Cf. XIII Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 51.

⁶ Cf. James H. Kroeger, “Exploring New Evangelization: Including Brief «Asian Echoes»” in *Mission Today* XIV (2012) July-September, 196.

⁷ James H. Kroeger, “Exploring New Evangelization,” 196.

⁸ Cf. James H. Kroeger, “Exploring New Evangelization,” 196-209.

⁹ Donald W. Wuerl, *New Evangelization: Passing on the Catholic Faith Today*, 19.

¹⁰ DC, presentation, p. 8.

¹¹ DC, presentation, p. 8, 9.

¹² DC, n. 6.

¹³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

¹⁴ Clyde Kluckhohn (1905-1960), was an American Anthropologist, who pioneered in the field of culture and personality, researching in the areas of linguistics, human genetics and archeology. (“Kluckhohn, Clyde,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, *Encyclopedia.com* (Nov 14, 2019), <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-magazines/kluckhohn-clyde>).

¹⁵ *sic*: In this work the American spellings are merely tolerated within the direct quotes, for methodological reasons.

¹⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures*, 4-5.

¹⁷ Cf. Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures*, 11.

¹⁸ Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures*, 14.

¹⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures*, 89.

²⁰ Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures*, 29.

²¹ Daphna Oyserman and Nicholas Sorensen “Understanding Cultural Syndrome Effects on What and How We Think: A situated Cognition Model,” in *Understanding Culture – Theory, Research and Application*, eds., Robert S. Wyer, Chi-yue Chiu and Ying-yi Hong (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 25.

²² Cf. Oyserman and Sorensen, “Understanding Cultural Syndrome,” 26-27.

²³ *sic*: In this work, the gender specific language is merely tolerated in the direct quotes for methodological reasons.

²⁴ John Monaghan and Peter Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 35.

²⁵ Monaghan and Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 38. The authors refer to Franz Boas, who in 1930, expressed this view in his work, inviting the anthropologists to become aware of their *kulturbrille* to keep themselves from biased judgement about others and other cultures.

²⁶ Monaghan and Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 39. The authors refer here to the work of Malinowski in 1944: Malinowski Bronislaw: *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*, Chapel Hill (ed.) (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

²⁷ Cf. Monaghan and Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 41.

²⁸ Cf. Monaghan and Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 41

²⁹ For a short explication of the determining realities of culture, see Monaghan and Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 43-44.

³⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture as Praxis* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), xi.

³¹ Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, xxi.

³² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

³³ Cf. Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, xiv; See also, Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7-8.

³⁴ Cf. Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, xxiv-xxv.

³⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, trans. Lydia Bauman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 12.

³⁶ Cf. Dhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-18; See also Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, 1-17.

³⁷ Cf. Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham, "Introduction," in *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, eds., Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM Press, 2011), 2.

³⁸ EN, n. 20.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Speech at the Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture, 20 May 1982*, in *AAS* 74 (1982), 685, as cited in Pontifical

Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), 2.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Adhortatio Apostolica Postsynodalis Pastores dabo vobis*, 25 Martii 1992, in *AAS* 84 (1992)8, n. 55; in English, *I will give you Shepherds – on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present day. Pastores dabo vobis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (New Jersey: Hunter Publishing, 1992), n. 55.

⁴¹ Pontifical Council for Culture, *Towards a Pastoral Approach to Culture*, 5.

⁴² Francis-Vincent Anthony, *Faith and Culture in Catholic Schools. An Educational-pastoral Research on Inculturation in the Tamil/Indian Cultural Context* (Chennai-India: Deepagam, 1999), 27.

⁴³ Cf. Francis-Vincent Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation: Toward an Empirical-theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis*, Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose Series – No. 136 (Rome: LAS, 1997), 42-43. The author explains how the terms *acculturation*, *enculturation* and *inculturation* speak of related processes and how inculturation could share some characteristics with enculturation and acculturation, however maintaining its specific significance and exclusive pastoral-theological nature.

⁴⁴ Acculturation, in anthropological parlance is defined thus: “The process of change giving rise to assimilation [...] is acculturation. Acculturation is the complex and dynamic set of processes resulting from close, prolonged contact between two societies, one of them dominant. This imbalance of power is necessary for assimilative change...”. See John Rhoades, “Assimilation,” in H. James Birx (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (Thousand Oaks-California: SAGE Publications, 2006), 293. See also Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation*, 42-43. Francis-Vincent also refers to the specific period of this transition within the theological framework of the Church, as after the Synod of 1974, citing Joseph Prasad Pinto, *Inculturation through basic communities* (Bangalore-India: Asian Trading Corporation, 1985), 10.

⁴⁵ The definition offered by Pedro Arrupe, the then Jesuit General in his letter to the Jesuits of the world, dated 14 May, 1978, has become phenomenal in its clarity and in the extent to which it has been referred to. It is to be noted here that just a year later, the term officially entered the Magisterium of the Church, though as concept it did exist even prior.

The definition of Pedro Arrupe states: “inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about “a new creation”.”- cited from, Pedro Arrupe, “On Inculcation to the Whole Society,” in Jerome Aixala (ed.), *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses -III* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981), 171-181.

⁴⁶ Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculcation*, 43.

⁴⁷ Cf. Anthony, *Faith and Culture in Catholic Schools*, 27-28.

⁴⁸ Cf. Anthony, *Faith and Culture in Catholic Schools*, 18.

⁴⁹ Cf. Anthony, *Faith and Culture in Catholic Schools*, 18.

⁵⁰ EG, n. 69; For other usages of the term inculcature and inculcation in the exhortation, see also nn. 116, 122, 126, 129, 143, 233.

⁵¹ Theologians like David Bosch, Thomas Grenham and others invite the Church and the local faith communities to go beyond that expression, “inculturation.” They raise a very simple question as to which ‘culture’ it would be, if we mean by inculcation an insertion of faith into a culture. See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary Edition, American Society of Missiology Series No. 16 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 385. The Original Edition of the same was published in 1991, while this edition is a 20th year commemoration; See also, Thomas G. Grenham, *The Unknown God: A Cognitive Semantic Perspective Religious and Theological Interculturation*, Religions and Discourse Series Vol. 25, ed. James M. M. Francis (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 64.

⁵² Cf. Joseph Blomjous, “Development in Mission Thinking and Practice 1959-1980: Inculcation and Interculturation,” *African Ecclesial Review* 22 (1980) 6, 393.

⁵³ Pedro Arrupe, “On Inculcation to the Whole Society,” in *Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses -III*, ed. Jerome Aixala (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981), 171-181, https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1978_arrupeinculturationsociety/, accessed on 28.08.2019.

⁵⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), n. 57. (Henceforth referred to as GDC); See also, Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, *Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020), nn.55-56. (DC).

⁵⁵ GDC, n.30.

⁵⁶ Cf. GDC, n.30. For a note on the artificiality of the ‘content-method’ dichotomy see also GDC, n. 149, which reads: “The principle of ‘fidelity to God and fidelity to man’ leads to an avoidance of any opposition or artificial separation or presumed neutrality between method and content. It affirms, rather, their necessary correlation and interaction.”

⁵⁷ Cf. DC, nn. 101, 149, 220, 237.

⁵⁸ GDC, n. 206. Part Four of GDC, in its chapters four and five, that is nn. 193 -214, concentrate on Catechesis in the socio-religious context and underlines the need to consider pluralistic situations with care, delineating the duty of the process of catechesis to take up the task of inculcation – while dealing with other religions and varied socio-cultural contexts.

⁵⁹ DC, n. 396.

⁶⁰ GDC, n. 204.

⁶¹ DC, n. 398

⁶² DC, n. 43.

⁶³ GDC n. 204, as quoted in DC n. 398.

⁶⁴ See DC nn. 48, 320, 354, 425, etc.

⁶⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 94-95.

⁶⁶ Kenneth Stokes, *Faith is a Verb: Dynamics of Adult Faith Development* (Mystic-Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), 68-69.

⁶⁷ EG, nn. 20-24.

⁶⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (22 November 2001), 19: AAS 94 (2002), 390, as cited in EG, n. 27.

⁶⁹ EN n.20.

⁷⁰ EG n.8.

⁷¹ DC n.396.

⁷² EG n.73.

⁷³ Cf. DC 395.

⁷⁴ Cf. DC 102.

⁷⁵ EG 183

⁷⁶ EG 186

⁷⁷ DC 60

⁷⁸ Cf. DC 46, 100, 102, 379, etc.
